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SUBJECT: CONCERNS ABOUT SECURITY, HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES  
COLLIDE IN GUERRERO

¶1. Summary: Concerns about human rights abuses and threats to security posed by drug trafficking collide in Mexico's southern state of Guerrero where Poloff met with a wide range of Mexican congressional representatives, government officials, human rights activists, NGOs and other members of civil society during a recent visit. State Congressional members were focused on immigration reform in the U.S. but short on answers when it came to addressing human rights concerns and economic challenges in their own state. Meanwhile NGOs and other members of civil society focused at length on human rights abuses -- often victimizing Guerrero's substantial indigenous community -- perpetrated by the security forces in the name of the war on drugs. Already one of Mexico's poorest states, Guerrero faces an uphill battle in overcoming security challenges and providing its population with the kind of economic opportunity needed to check the flow of migrants to major cities in more prosperous states as well as the U.S.

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GUERRERO'S LANDSCAPE, ECONOMY, AND PEOPLE  
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¶2. The dire poverty that characterizes much of the mountainous state of Guerrero is akin to the variety observed in much of the third world that has not kept apace with the transformations produced by globalization. Economic development centers around Acapulco as a tourist hub and Zihuatanejo in the western part of the state. Development in much of the rest of the state is dominated by agriculture or artisan handicrafts. Many schools do not have textbooks in indigenous languages, lack adequate teachers, and are not furnished.

¶3. Guerrero serves as the home for many members of Mexico's diverse indigenous community accounting for 17 percent of the state's population. Each of the group's members in Guerrero in turn account for a significant proportion of that group's population in Mexico countrywide.

--Nahualts (35.2%)  
--Mixtecos (28.7%)  
--Tlapanecos (24.0%)  
--Amuzgos (9.7%)

Guerrero's indigenous groups live mainly in the mountainous region of the state and generally represent the state's most marginalized members. Over the last 20 years, migration has emerged as a primary survival option for much of the indigenous population. Noe Ramos Cabrera, President for the Commission on Indigenous Affairs told poloff that more than 37,000 day laborers leave Guerrero annually in search of work and that 80 percent of all indigenous homes have at least one family working as a migrant agricultural worker in the Mexican states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Morelos, Chihuahua, and

Baja California or in the U.S. With regard to health challenges, Ramos lamented the fact that alcoholism remains the leading cause of death for the indigenous population in Guerrero.

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GUERRERO'S DRUG WAR  
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¶4. Guerrero has become one of the major staging grounds for Mexico's drug wars given the increasing number of weapons entering the state and the growth in the production of poppies used in heroin production. Human rights organizations say that the weapons coming into the state end up in the hands of the poor. Meanwhile Poppy production in Guerrero has tripled making it Mexico's top producer according to indigenous NGOs and state government officials in Guerrero. Many uneducated farmers have resorted to poppy production in order to survive, because regular food production sales are not sufficient to support their families and much of the land in Guerrero's more mountainous regions do support the cultivation of high-value crops. The Sinaloa cartel is the most dominant cartel in the state. However, clashes of the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels have increased over the years producing violence in Acapulco and Zihuatenejo. The increase in drug violence and drug-related killings prompted President Calderon to send more troops to the region.

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GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND CIVIL SOCIETY DISAGREE ON SECURITY  
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¶5. Guerrero has been the locus of conflict between armed leftist groups and the military for decades and mistreatment of indigenous communities has too often been an unfortunate

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by product of this clash. Not surprisingly, many members of the indigenous community are apprehensive about the higher profile the military has assumed in combating drug trafficking in the state. The Tlachinollan Mountain Center for Human Rights and a network of indigenous human rights organizations in Ayutla expressed concern about illegal searches conducted within indigenous communities and fear an expanded presence of the military would only contribute to more abuses.

¶6. As an example of the ongoing problem, several of the indigenous groups with whom poloff met in Ayutla cited the cases of two indigenous women, Valentina Rosendo Cantu and Ines Fernandez Ortega, who were allegedly raped by Mexican soldiers in 2002. When Rosendo and Fernandez sought to file their complaint with Mexican authorities, they were told by military officials the Mexican military had jurisdiction over the case but that they shouldn't bother to take the matter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights because Mexican soldiers have to be convicted of their crimes in a military court. In October 2007, they presented their case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington D.C. Since then, the women and their families told poloff they have received many threats. Indigenous groups requested the USG's help in protecting their communities from abuse at the hands of the military.

¶7. State public security officials, however, tend to discount such concerns and cite efforts to professionalize their own security forces. Humberto Quintil Calvo Memije, a senior official from the State's Public Security Office, said he favored the military's involvement, maintaining it was making a significant contribution to the state's counter drug efforts. In the face of complaints about corruption within the security forces, Calvo remarked that his office had developed mechanisms to better regulate the police and hire commanders, including through the administration of periodic toxicology exams. Conceding the fact that police corruption still remains a major problem in Guerrero, Calvo blamed poor

pay for police as the major cause for corruption.

18. Comment: Guerrero is a microcosm of the "other Mexico" that faces entrenched poverty and the kinds of security problems and human rights concerns that attend regions afflicted with significant drug trafficking activity. The Calderon administration has relied on the military to confront the security challenges that exist in Guerrero but that involvement has been met with suspicion on the part of many in the rural communities. Security is a prerequisite for a brighter future for Guerrero but only if it is accompanied by significant public and private sector investment that meets the local population's basic human needs and creates genuine economic opportunity. End Comment.

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